
Memoria, Verdad, y Justicia: Commemorative Acts of Solidarity for Memory, Truth, and Justice in South America

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Abstract:

On March 24, 2016, a national holiday of Remembrance took place in Argentina as a means of commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of *los desaparecidos* (the disappeared ones). This holiday is a day to remember those who have been lost due to terrorism of the state, to celebrate the end of a murderous military coup, and to come together to demonstrate against past, current, and future crimes against humanity. Of the many groups that come in celebration and protest, none are as renowned or as influential as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. These women spoke out against the military regime when it was most dangerous to do so and gained invaluable steps against infringements on human rights. Thus, this organization became an example for others who fight on a global scale against the disappearances of loved ones, in turn amplifying a movement where individuals make and re-make their identities and activism through connection with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo across national and geographic boundaries. This movement, described in this work as *Global Critical Solidarity*, provides a framework for further investigation of human rights movements based in local contexts that are (re)made in digital spaces to reach global audiences, in turn developing a deep sense of kinship that has critical implications for the understanding of shared humanity through diversity.

THE POWER OF NARRATION

Words can have immeasurable power. Indeed, there is no force greater than that of the written or spoken word when used to bring together diverse communities. With this power people are able to state truths, to communicate needs, or even to spark change. It is with this power that the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo gained global recognition and became a symbol of hope for those who have experienced the tragedy of forced *disappearances* of loved ones.

In 2016, I was privileged to hear firsthand accounts and culturally imbued narratives of individuals who were part of the organization of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and that were touched by the tragedies that took place in Argentina over forty years ago. I saw the slogans of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo reach the farthest corners of the city of Buenos Aires and also span the globe through the World Wide Web in ways that brought their tragic history to life. Through the communication of this shared traumatic narrative and by means of these powerful slogans, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo keep the memory of their children alive, and they identify with others on a global scale who have experienced similar tragic loss. Finally, through the power of their words I was drawn to this organization, and due to their inherent desire as mothers to protect and prevent similar loss they then charged me with sharing this narrative via my privileged platform.¹⁹¹

To achieve this task, I first provide context for why and how the Association of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo came to be. I then reiterate, as other scholars have done, this context in conversation with similar situations of human rights infringements across South America. In understanding the history of these disappearances and the similarities with which they occur, a pattern emerged where more and more individuals throughout all of Latin America and beyond sought out the guidance of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. By expanding the purview of research from a local

¹⁹¹ Celia de Prósperi, in-person conversation with author, March 22, 2016.

to a global context, I am able to shed light on a phenomenon of individuals reaching beyond geographic boundaries (both in person and digitally) to recognize the immense gains for human rights that the Mothers achieved and to seek validation in connection with this organization. I argue that in doing so, these individuals engage in a pilgrimage for kinship, or participate in what I call Global Critical Solidarity. It is through a critical ethnographic perspective that I work with participants to understand the context of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the (re)making of their slogans as a case study to argue the value of Global Critical Solidarity. Finally, I discover the invocation of these slogans in current events and take this as a case in point for the importance of this work.

THE ASSOCIATION OF THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO

In 1976, a period of civil unrest in Argentina, upwards of thirty thousand children disappeared (or, rather, *were disappeared*) due to a vicious military dictatorship called the “Junta.”¹⁹² The Junta, coming from the Spanish word *juntar* - to join - consisted of the army, navy, and air force of Argentina combined. As a result of the disappearances of loved ones, the sisters, wives, mothers, and grandmothers of those missing began to question the whereabouts of their families and the role of the government in these cases. These individuals began reporting their children as missing to police authorities. They also began frequenting political offices, seeking guidance from religious officials, and searched for answers from all organizations and leaders to whom they had access. At each organization, and with each query into the vanishing of their children, these Mothers would get the run-around. They were either instructed to come back tomorrow, or worse were told that their child had no existing records, and therefore must have never existed.

¹⁹² Sally Webb Thornton, “Grief Transformed: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo,” *Journal of Death and Dying* 41, no. 4 (2016): 280

After some time, the Mothers became familiar with others going through the same battle and they forged a bond. Through this new alliance, these Mothers decided that something more needed to be done; they needed to come together to find out the truth behind what happened to their children. This led to fourteen women gathering in the one human rights arena that they knew of the Plaza de Mayo.

The Plaza de Mayo was located in front of the presidential palace in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and was (and continues to be) a space where frequent displays of activism for human rights occur. These disillusioned Mothers gathered in this central location, defiantly in the face of political leaders, in the hopes that they could gain audience with those responsible, to learn of what came of their children. It is on this platform that the Mothers used their elocutionary powers to demand change in the government and recompense for the loss of their children, *los desaparecidos*.

At the Plaza de Mayo, these women would come together and talk about their disappeared loved ones. More people heard their stories and saw them at the plaza, and eventually, their cause began to grow. With this growth the Mothers saw a need for a uniform equal to that of the military regime. They decided that a baby's cloth diaper would further connect them to their lost children, so they placed them upon their heads to create a headscarf, remaking this object into a symbol. This symbol perplexed passersby, providing an opening to even more avenues of powerful communication for these Mothers. Thus, the diaper wrapped around their heads re-made the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo into a powerful visual symbol, helping them recognize one-another, spreading word of the disappearance of their loved ones, and serving as a guiding light for others to join their cause (see figure 1).¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Demetrio Iramain, *Una Historia de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2017), 1–50.



Figure 1. Collectable magazine of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo depicting the diaper headscarves.

Indeed, their cause grew so much that it became difficult to distinguish one *desaparecido* from another. So, the Mothers then embroidered the names of their children, the dates of their disappearances, and their slogan “Aparición con vida” on the symbolic white scarves, as a reminder both to themselves and to their society that what happened would never be forgiven or forgotten. They carried images of their children, often as large placards, or they wore them as large lockets around their necks. They would hold tightly to these images and tell their sorrows to any who would listen, while promenading in the faces of those who directly wronged their families and denied any knowledge of such actions. This activism eventually led to such a vast growth in numbers that in 1979 they became official as an “organization promoting democratic values”¹⁹⁴ and fighting against the violation of human rights.

These brave women had insurmountable courage to demonstrate in this plaza because it was heavily guarded by military who were placed there as a means to diffuse any possible opposition to the Junta. Armed men demanded that the women not *gather* in the plaza, so instead they would walk

¹⁹⁴ Marguerite Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Latin American Silhouettes* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2017), 2.

defiantly around the plaza every Thursday at 3:30.¹⁹⁵ The Mothers, under the protection of *motherhood*, were some of the only people to stand up successfully against the dictatorship at that time, despite the constant harassment of military authorities. They were able to do so by highlighting their virtue as *mothers*, a sacred role in many South American contexts, and by remaking this identity into one of political activism.

As the threat to the Junta grew, this military coup began to lash out against the Mothers. “The junta, which legitimated its mission with the rhetoric of Christian and family values, could hardly gun down defenseless mothers in public. So, it tried dismissing the Mothers as ‘crazy old women’ or *locas* and threatened the women individually in their homes and on their way to and from the Plaza.”¹⁹⁶ The Mothers subverted this claim of *locura* or *craziness* by turning it on its head, remaking this assertion into a part of their identity by agreeing that indeed the loss of a child would drive anyone crazy. Thus, what was a historically successful tactic of using cultural norms and roles as a means to subjugate women,¹⁹⁷ was ineffective since the Mothers used their status of motherhood to incorporate this slight as justification for their movement. Finally, the Junta began disappearing these women. As noted in the *Los Angeles Times* on the thirtieth anniversary of the disappeared in 2006, even some of the founding Mothers of the organization became another number in the list of the disappeared including Azucena Villaflor de De Vicente¹⁹⁸ (figure 2, right;), María Eugenia Ponce de Bianco (figure 2, middle), and Esther Ballestrino de Careaga (figure 2, left), and surely many others.

¹⁹⁵ Karen A. Foss and Kathy L. Domenici, “Haunting Argentina: Synecdoche in the Protests of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87, no. 3 (2001): 237–58.

¹⁹⁶ Diana Taylor, *Making a Spectacle: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 100

¹⁹⁷ Karen Engle, “From Skepticism to Embrace: Human Rights and the American Anthropological Association from 1947–1999,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (2001): 536 Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Annelise Riles, “Anthropology, Human Rights, and Legal Knowledge: Culture in the Iron Cage,” *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 1 (2006): 52. Anne-Belinda S. Preis, “Human Rights as Cultural Practice: An Anthropological Critique,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1996): 286.

¹⁹⁸ Thornton, “Grief Transformed.”



Figure 2. Poster of Mothers who were disappeared, displayed at Santa Cruz Church, Buenos Aires.

Through their resolve and articulate *consignas* (slogans) these women were able to not only stand in the face of the Junta but also enact governmental change. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo are one of the few examples in history to not only stand in direct opposition to such a regime but also to gain ground against such human rights abuses. This successful use of words to make and remake the identities of these women has reverberated through both space and time as a call to others to join in the fight against infringement on human rights.

INFRINGEMENTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Many people around the world identified very closely with the words, actions, and activism of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, because they were able to rise beyond their context of extreme human rights infringements. Indeed, the infringements experienced in the context of Argentina in the mid to late 1970s and early 1980s should never have happened, as “only a handful of rights cannot be suspended according to the vital needs of national security, including: prohibitions on discrimination, torture, slavery, ex post facto punishment, and debtor’s prison as well as rights to life, freedom of thought, and personhood before the law... and the prohibition against genocide.”¹⁹⁹ However, this

¹⁹⁹ David P. Forsythe, “US Foreign Policy and Human Rights: Situating Obama.” *Human Rights Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2011): 771, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2011.0039>.

simply was not the case. The rights of the children of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo were grotesquely denigrated and virtually ignored, for the purpose of *national security*, according to the Junta. The military coups of the Junta used whatever means necessary to maintain control, including the persecution of their own people.

During the Junta regime, over thirty thousand people were taken. This number reflects children (typically young adults in their twenties and thirties, but some as young as thirteen years) who had family members left to fight for answers in their wake.²⁰⁰ This number does not account for those who were part of entire families that were taken, resulting in the possibility for more than forty-five thousand persons being disappeared.²⁰¹ While this alone is devastating, knowing what actually happened to those who were disappeared is even more debilitating.

Those who were taken were ambushed in their own homes by plain-clothed officers who blocked off their streets with unregistered vehicles, ransacked their houses, and assaulted both those taken, and their family members left behind.²⁰² Once taken, these poor souls were tortured for hours on end, then they were disposed of or disappeared in mass graves, by burning, by being thrown into the sea, or left roadside. Even those who, after torture, were viewed as innocent were still killed since that was an easier path than going through governmental channels of setting them free.²⁰³ Similarly, across South America, “death squad activity, routine torture by police and military forces, ‘disappearances,’ arbitrary arrests, secret prisons, and virtually indiscriminate massacres have been at various times, epidemic in Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Paraguay, and Bolivia.”²⁰⁴ Due to this disturbing history and these atrocities, “Latin American human rights

²⁰⁰ Thornton, “Grief Transformed.”

²⁰¹ Foss and Domenici, “Haunting Argentina.”

²⁰² Thornton, “Grief Transformed.”

²⁰³ Andrea Malin, “Mother Who Won’t Disappear,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (1994): 194–95, <https://doi.org/10.2307/762416>, www.jstor.org/stable/762416.

²⁰⁴ Ted C. Lewellen, “Structure of Terror: A Systems Analysis of Repression in El Salvador,” in *Human Rights and Third World Development*, ed. George W. Shepherd Jr and Ved P. Nanda (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 59.

advocates are concerned about terrorism, abuse of civil-political rights, and social structural violence.”²⁰⁵ For these many reasons, those particularly from the South American context have found kinship with the Mothers.

CRITICAL SOLIDARITY

This kinship exists through a deep understanding of such traumatic experiences and infringements upon human rights that is shared not only in Argentina, but throughout South America. People began to look to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo for guidance on how to effectively destabilize similar regimes across these contexts. They would reach out to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who would, in turn, embrace them as mothers and as equals who similarly experienced the tragic loss of loved ones. It is this acceptance that has created a unique type of pilgrimage for those who have also endured the disappearance of family members. Many who have had dealt with the sudden disappearance of loved ones have traveled in search of kinship with the Mothers and have brought their fight to the symbolic location of the Plaza de Mayo.

Thus, people from varying contexts would travel to Buenos Aires, Argentina, in search of an appropriate platform for their cause and in hopes of finding solidarity with those who have suffered extreme loss. Solidarity in this sense, is not a simple feeling of kinship but rather is a *critical solidarity*—a concept ripe with subtle implications and that bares much more complex consideration. *Critical Solidarity* is more than a simple search for empathy; instead, it is the dialogic process of understanding that takes place between individuals who share similar experiences that comes from the culmination of the acknowledgement of loss, the reciprocal understanding of a shared traumatic pain, and which ultimately leads to a feeling of healing or hope of emancipation from the root cause of the trauma.

²⁰⁵ Ellen Messer, “Pluralist Approaches to Human Rights,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 53, no. 3 (1997): 301.

The use of “critical” in the term *critical solidarity* means to say that there is an emancipatory potential between interlocutors that engages on multiple pragmatic horizons.²⁰⁶ People who travel in search of *critical solidarity* with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo make this pilgrimage in hopes that their subjectivity will be validated. They are looking for their normative understanding of tragic events to be understood and hope that these women will join them in solidarity both politically and emotionally on the basis of the traumatic shared experience of forced disappearances of loved ones. Furthermore, these victims recognize that the organization of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have made great gains against human rights violations. Thus, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have transformed from simply those who have experienced loss to stewards of kinship who, on a hermeneutical level, have transcended their original cause to become a beacon of solidarity, unity, and connection across boundaries.

GLOBAL CRITICAL SOLIDARITY

Indeed, this form of critical solidarity in the context of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, has grown from the local context of Argentina to a global movement where both the Mothers and people from around the world who have experienced a tragic loss come together to form emotional and political connections that guide them in the fight against the regimes that disappeared their loved ones, and to fight for the emancipation of all who are in need of justice for crimes against humanity.

With respect to critical solidarity, these people come from many places. “In addition to Argentina’s Mothers who formed their movement in 1977, mothers formed human rights movements in Chile in 1974, and around the same time, they emerged in Brazil, Uruguay, Guatemala, and Honduras. In 1981, a group appeared in El Salvador, and in 1990 they mobilized in Sri Lanka.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Phil Francis Carspecken, *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 105

²⁰⁷ Malin, “Mother Who Won’t Disappear.”

Researchers estimate that approximately ninety thousand people from Latin America have been disappeared by malicious governments, and while these countries certainly find solidarity with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, they are not the only part of the world that shares the experience of the disappearance of a loved one.

In Sri Lanka, for example, since the 1980s nearly forty thousand disappearances have taken place. The military forces in Sri Lanka used tactics practically identical to those of the Junta in Argentina and have created similar unrest among the families of the disappeared. “In concentrating its repression on young people, the regimes in both Sri Lanka and Latin America created a critical mass of women who, despite class divisions and differences in life experiences and values had one thing in common: they were mothers of children who had disappeared.”²⁰⁸ These individuals/organizations from around the world have found Global Critical Solidarity, or a deep sense of belonging that engages interlocutors beyond national boundaries on multiple pragmatic levels with a strong symbol (in this case, the Association of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo), thereby creating the potential for deep healing and emancipation through a dialogic global kinship. They identify with the Mothers in Argentina because they too have experienced tragic crimes against humanity.

Thus, it is through the concept of Global Critical Solidarity situated within the context of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, that this research looks to not only represent the narrative of the Mothers but also to discover the ways other individuals make and remake their own identities and causes in kinship with the Mothers. This work hopes to shed light on Global Critical Solidarity as a valid lens through which to view current and future human rights campaigns as they converge across national borders. Finally, this work hopes to provide precedence of deep empathy and solidarity as important components to conducting and understanding research through kinship with those who

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

share personal traumatic narratives. This important work will do so by answering the following research questions:

1. In what discursive contexts do human rights campaigns of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo appear/reappear (orally, visually, digitally)?
2. In what ways do the human rights campaigns of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo expand beyond the geographic boundaries of Argentina to invite Global Critical Solidarity with other contexts?

METHODOLOGY: THE POWER OF CONTEXT

When looking into global movements, particularly those with tragic underpinnings, it is imperative to understand the context from which the research evolves. This includes the local and global constructs and implications, the explicit positionality of the participants along with their demands as stakeholders in the research, and the researcher's role as a dialogic entity throughout the course of the investigation. The various ways in which these three perspectives interact makes for the rich conditions of the research, and their continued engagement gives way to unique avenues for connection that bridge beyond the snapshot of insight provided by the research. Indeed, the interconnections discovered by this investigation in particular may pave the way for the repeated (re)making of this research as new phenomenon coincide with the first instance of this work.

In describing the particular context of this work, and regarding the local and global constructs and implications at play at the time of the investigation, it was made quite evident to the researcher that the local and global contexts were not only at odds with one another, but they led to a dichotomous positioning of the work itself. Indeed—

the noetic praxis of political theology in North America will involve an extensive collaboration within contexts characterized by a global perspective. A global perspective is intrinsic to political theology in the United States insofar as economic and political life in the United States is itself intrinsically global in its effects and consequences. There is also a theological reason for such a perspective: the concrete histories of suffering are simultaneously immanent in particular places and times and

by that very immanence transcend those particularities to become one with all victims throughout space and time.²⁰⁹

This brings attention to the bifurcated context of this work by acknowledging that these concrete histories of suffering have the potential to transcend the context in which they were originally created. Due to digital advancements, this is even more prominent, and such a context allows for a Global Critical Solidarity to form, where all victims of similar tragedies find solace in and through a dialogic process of making and remaking their identities in conversation with others who have been similarly wronged. It also, however, discusses the role of the United States in relation to these global perspectives as an enactor, which highlights another unique aspect of this research that emerged due to the researcher being from the United States.

The knowledge of the participants that they were interacting with an investigative team (albeit on individual research projects) from the United States, brought to the foreground both distrust of and discomfort with the credibility and motives for the various research projects. This shows the interaction among the local and global realities of this work, the participants' understanding and personal experiences within those realities, and their acceptance (or not) of the researchers' positionalities all in conversation with one another.

THE POWER OF EMPATHY: THE WHY

The concept of Global Critical Solidarity is also supremely important in understanding researcher motives for undertaking investigative work. Researchers should engage in such critical work, which “cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity; therefore it cannot unfold in the antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed. No one

²⁰⁹ Matthew L. Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims: Toward a Theology of Social Transformation* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 21.

can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so.”²¹⁰ This resonates deeply with my positionality as a researcher.

All researchers should make explicit their positionality within research, because “our responsibilities should lie in how we frame, approach, and attend to the constantly fluctuating dynamics being researched and how the research is exacting impacts.”²¹¹ This sense of responsibility, this consideration not only for the context of the work but for the lasting impact on the individuals with whom I met and the relationships that I, as a researcher, built with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, catalyzed the forward movement of this work.

This work began as a simple analysis of digital invocations of slogans for an introductory course on Spanish pragmatics. I quickly discovered, however, how deeply moved I was by my own personal connections to Argentina and by my admiration for the Mothers. This sense of solidarity only grew, the more I saw individuals across the globe (re)making the slogans of the Mothers to fit their own heart-wrenching contexts (to be seen in further detail in this work). Finally, I had the opportunity to meet the Mothers in person during a week-long trip to Argentina where I was able to connect, listen (and really *hear*), and practice deep empathy with this research context and these individuals directly, to stand in solidarity with them despite our differences.

At first, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo had no interest in meeting with a group of researchers from the United States. This was in large part due to the aforementioned socially imbued research context that was laden with the historical background of the role of the United States in militia regimes in South America. Indeed, I experienced contrasting perspectives, hesitance, and at times anger with the presence of Americans (including the presence of the investigative team, myself,

²¹⁰ Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder 1970), 85

²¹¹ Leigh Patel, *Decolonizing Educational Research: From Ownership to Answerability* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 59

and U.S. President Barack Obama in Argentina) during their celebratory commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of *los desaparecidos*.

However, it was through my identity—or in other words, the combination of being a woman, being fluent in Spanish, being a privileged academic, and being an individual from the United States who demonstrated openly the ability to listen and forge a deep sense of community with the mothers through a critical solidarity—that I was given audience with one of the founding members of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Celia de Prósperi (known affectionately as La Chela, may she rest in peace, 1925–2018). During my conversation with her, she told me about her daughter and said her story was and *is* the story of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, she said *we remember them* (the collective disappeared) *by telling this story* and it was my responsibility to *bring the story to my people*.²¹²

The weight of this responsibility touches me to this day. I recognize that as a researcher it is imperative to (re)assess my own subjectivity and ethical stance and to measure my resolve so as to represent the research context and participants in their own words as accurately and as fully as possible. Therefore, in an attempt to maintain this viewpoint, this work is not simply written about the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, but with them and with those who sought Global Critical Solidarity with these women both in person and digitally during the time of this research.

THE POWER OF DIALOGIC RESEARCH: THE HOW

As a researcher, I also understand the need to demonstrate a concrete methodology to prove the rigor of the investigation at large. However, I take issue with the idea that social science research, in particular, must follow similar or the same methods as STEM work to achieve replicability and validity. This fallacy in thinking often undermines the purpose of humanities work. Rather than simply accepting a hard and fast method, this work relies on Critical Ethnographic Perspective as guiding

²¹² Celia de Prósperi, in-person conversation with author, March 22, 2016.

principles or a meta-theory through which the research operates, as a means to not only provide flexibility of methodology but also to further question the Western-centric model through the words of the Mothers themselves.²¹³ This type of work involved gathering data through qualitative measures consistent with ethnographic traditions such as observations, field-notes, and interviews, and contextual analysis to triangulate the data to represent the full context of both previous and current human rights endeavors taking place through these powerful commemorative speech acts. Finally, this meta-theory encourages a dialogic process between the researcher and the research through reflexivity and awareness of self-positionality within the context of inquiry.

This reflexivity of context meant taking into consideration human rights research in tandem with the slogans of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and resulting hashtags (that were created by and were continually influenced through the work of this organization) and exploring the power of these words (for the Mothers and others) as they became exemplar to those experiencing similar tragedies. Thus, prior to the researcher's departure for the week-long commemoration in Argentina, various hashtag slogans used by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo were analyzed via social media (primarily Twitter) over the course of the year leading up to the commemoration. This was done through pragmatic analysis of archival data (Twitter data) or artifacts, "in terms of the participant's context models of their own political identities, roles, goals, actions and beliefs."²¹⁴ This entails the digital representations of slogans, public displays of slogans, investigation of rights claims in previous academic texts in Argentina, and field notes of conversations/visual representations of these *consignas*.

Initial findings from these digital slogans were then compared with human rights campaigns both seen and heard (and then documented with field notes and photographs) in Argentina during

²¹³ Phil Francis Carspecken, *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

²¹⁴ Teun A. Van Dijk, "War Rhetoric of a Little Ally: Political Implicatures and Aznar's Legitimatization of the War in Iraq," *Journal of Language and Politics* 4, no 1 (2005): 65.

the commemorative events that took place the week of the fortieth anniversary of the *desaparecidos* on the national holiday of Remembrance on March 24, 2016. Throughout the week, I collected and catalogued (through groupings of times and locations) the data from participants who consented to observations and interviews, and who provided artifacts such as pictures of locations and organization slogans, posters, pamphlets, magazines, fliers, schedules, and more. During semi-structured interviews (that either involved detailed field notes or audio/video recordings depending on the wishes of the participants), I explicitly asked individuals to describe in their own words what the intended meanings were of these various human rights campaigns. The culmination of this week took place on Thursday the 24th of March 2016, which was the national holiday of Remembrance marking the fortieth year since the *desaparecidos* were first taken. It happened to fall on a Thursday, the day of the week that the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo would typically march. On this day, they held a large procession that concluded at the Plaza de Mayo (see figure 3).



Figure 3. Aerial photo of the thousands of people demonstrating in the Plaza de Mayo on May 24, 2016.

Finally, upon return to the United States, guided member-checks took place, when possible, where the investigator followed up with individuals to ensure both accuracy and accountability in tandem with even more artifactual collection via social media for further triangulation of this work.

The cumulative and longitudinal data gathered across digital and real-time platforms not only constitutes the critical ethnographic perspective presented here but also validates Global Critical Solidarity as a viable construct worth further investigation. Finally, through these rigorous means of investigation, this study strives to represent wholly the tumultuous setting in which such language was (re)produced, which included the researcher.

The analysis of data included contemplative conversation with researcher-participants, extensive data coding and interpretation, transcription of interviews, observation notes and reflections, and theoretical underpinnings of critical ethnography to gain an understanding of the Global Critical Solidarity with a human rights lens. Additionally, all photographs and transcripts were grouped together based on location of data collection and research question theme, which gave another perspective on the context of these slogans so that a final round of analysis of these words took place, adding reliability to the study overall. Finally, this research has compared social media to the data collected on the same theme, essentially connecting each of these slogans across geographic boundaries to the cultures and contexts in which they invoke Global Critical Solidarity.

THE POWER OF CONNECTION: THE WHO

Since this research was conducted both digitally and in person in Argentina, while in collaboration with other ongoing research projects, the participant pool was as diverse as the research interests taking place. Participants in Argentina included perspectives as vast as founding voices of the organization of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, a law firm working on the reparations for families of the disappeared, actual family members of the disappeared, religious leaders, educators, and pedestrians from various countries marching in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary. This participant pool even included people who traveled from as far as Mexico and Brussels in critical

solidarity with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Argentine people. These organizations and/or people agreed not only to speak with the researchers but to also provide access to others, including close and distant relatives of the disappeared ones and/or leaders of various political groups. Furthermore, digital participants were included through their publicly accessible words on social media. These individuals came from all across the globe to show their solidarity with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.

FINDINGS: THE POWER OF MEMORY, TRUTH, AND JUSTICE

In response to the first research question, “In what discursive contexts do human rights campaigns of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo appear/reappear (orally, visually, digitally)?”, this work parsed out some of the rhetoric used by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and which was adopted by various others. This helped to gain insight into how this organization relates to people on a deeper emotional and critical level. These slogans were seen in various forms across a very diverse linguistic landscape not only during the event of the fortieth anniversary, but also leading up to and following this event. They spanned both physical and electronic dimensions and were shared or reposted multiple times for varying audiences and across geographic boundaries. Each slogan is intended to highlight particular information or goals from past trials and tribulations through *Memoria, Verdad, y Justicia* (memory, truth, and justice) to bring together diverse people with one common goal for the betterment of the future. These slogans include: “40 años del golpe militar” (40 years of military coup); “30 Mil Razones/Presentes” (30 thousand reasons/present); “Nunca Más” (never again); and “Aparición con vida” (appearance with life).²¹⁵

Due to the unique time of this celebration being exactly forty years later, this particular number was represented as important both orally and visually through the slogan “40 años del golpe militar”

²¹⁵ All translations in this section are my own.

(40 years of military coup). People used this phrase most frequently to demonstrate that the fight is a continuation. This sentence establishes that the struggle has never ceased, and that this history defines Argentinians. This number was used frequently to show events that took place at the commemorative celebration (see figure 3) and was used as both a nod to and a procession for history.

By far one of the most emotionally embedded messages that emanated throughout the week and at the commemoration was the phrase “30 Mil Razones” or “30 Mil Presentes” (30 thousand reasons/present). During the presentation given by the Organization of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo at the celebration in the Plaza de Mayo on March 24, this *consigna* rang through the crowd. The Mothers on stage would call out “¡30 mil personas desaparecidos!” and the mass of people responded “¡presente!”, then they would yell “vive” (alive) from the stage and the congregation sang “siempre” (always). This was one of the many forms in which this particular phrase was witnessed. Other forms included extensive street art, posters and handouts displayed and distributed on the streets and at the university, and online images (see figures 4 and 5).



Figure 4. Photo of graffiti in the street with 30000.



Figure 5. with 30MIL.

Perhaps the most iconic phrase used in tandem with the Mothers of the plaza de mayo is “Nunca Más” (never again). This quote shows the angst of what happened and the fight to prevent such atrocities from ever taking place again (see figure 6). It uses the sentiment that never again could we (humanity) allow something so tragic to take place; never again, can we be silent in the face of

atrocious human rights violations; and never again can we forget what took place forty years ago. This particular invocation is certainly the most widely used and (re)made *consigna* of the Mothers (to be further discussed in the Implications section of this work).



Figure 6. Vivid visual of “Nunca mas,” never again.

Finally, one of the most influential of all the consignas (slogans) of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo was “Aparición con vida” or “appearance with life” which the Organization of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo explain in detail within their own collectable magazine:

Quizás previendo que sus hijos o hijas no volverían físicamente con ellas, en la frase denunciaban para siempre el carácter terrorista y criminal de un Estado que fue autor de las desapariciones, que conseguía sin devolver con vida a los secuestrados y que, por añadidura, era perfectamente incapaz de juzgar a los responsables. Nunca iban a aceptar la muerte de sus hijos; menos aún iban a ser ellas quienes los dieron por fallecidos a cambio de una pensión. Nunca iban a permitir que el Estado que los desapareció se librara tan fácilmente de sus culpas, declarándolos muertos.²¹⁶ (*Perhaps anticipating that their sons or daughters would never physically return to them, in this phrase, they forever denounce the terrorist and criminal nature of a State that was author to the disappearances, that persevered without returning hostages alive and that, moreover, was perfectly incapable of prosecuting those who were responsible. The Mothers would never accept the death of their children; fewer still would be the ones who would give them up as dead in exchange for a pension. Never would they allow a State who disappeared them to liberate so easily from their sins, in declaring them dead.*)

This particular phrase has been used as a symbol for nearly forty years now and was both heard and seen by the researcher. These words were printed and published, highlighted in artwork, and appeared various times online. For example, the phrase was seen prominently posted on the wall

²¹⁶ Demetrio Iramain, *Una Historia de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (Buenos Aires: Universidad Nacional de La Plata, 2017), 1–50.

of the historic office of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, on a poster that states “Aparición con vida, Justicia, Castigo a culpables” (appearance with life, justice, punish those responsible) (see figure 7). Additionally, this invocation has been repurposed to represent not only the original context of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, but also for disappearances that occurred later, and in other countries. Thus, this slogan can be viewed as an exemplar invocation that represents the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and their identity as an organization, particularly since it has reached beyond the Argentinian context across spatial and temporal boundaries, which attends to the second research question: In what ways do the human rights campaigns of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo expand beyond the geographic boundaries of Argentina to invite critical solidarity with other contexts?



Figure 7. Poster on the wall of the Office of the Association of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.

In response to this research question, an overwhelming amount of data suggests that the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo are a symbol not only for Argentina but for nearly all of South America. This was seen not only in person on March 24 at the Plaza de Mayo but also digitally in the Twittersphere. This goes to show that this organization has crossed both geographic and political boundaries to invoke a sense of Global Critical Solidarity and justice for Spanish-speaking communities that have experienced similar human rights offenses and military regimes. For example, toward the end of the ceremony for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo on March 24, they allowed

AYÚDANOS A LOCALIZARLOS

 AVELAR AMEL GONZÁLEZ	 MARTÍN PABLO BERZIANA	 HINKEL JOFRA JAZGALA	 SEVERINO ROLDÁN	 JOSÉ IVÁN RODRÍGUEZ LLATINA	 EDUARDO ARCEFIN MENDETA SALGADO	 ABEL ARANA YÁÑEZ RIVAS	 LEONEL CASTRO ARCEBAL	 MIGUEL AMIEL MARTÍNEZ	 CARLOS IVÁN SALAZAR VELASCO	 CONRADO TEJADA RIERA	 MAGALLÁN BUREN LÁZARO VALDIVIA
 ALEXANDER ROCA VERCILLO	 JULIO CÉSAR BARRIOS JARA	 JOSÉ ÁNGEL ASANZA CASPIELLO	 JORGE ÁLVAREZ RUIZ	 ADÁN ABRAHAM VELAZCO	 MARIO EZEQUIEL GARCÍA	 LUIS ÁNGEL FERRÁNDEZ JIRICA	 JORGE ANTONIO TORRES LEZAMA	 MARIO TIBERIACA FLORES	 JAZIEL SÁNCHEZ SÁNCHEZ	 ANTONIO QUINTANA AGUIÑO	 JULIO CÉSAR VILELA RODRÍGUEZ
 JOSÉ ÁNGEL CORTÉS	 JORGE ARRIAL CRUZ RONDERA	 GIOVANNI SALAS HERNÁNDEZ	 GREGORIO SALAS QUINTANA LE CRUZ	 LUIS ÁNGEL VÁZQUEZ ÁLVAREZ	 CARLOS VÁZQUEZ HERNÁNDEZ MURIEL	 ISRAEL JACINTO LLANERO	 JULIO CÉSAR LÓPEZ TORRES	 JOSÉ LUIS LUNA TORRES	 RODRIGO MORALES GARCÍA	 MAURICIO GONZÁLEZ VELASCO	 CÉSAR MANUEL GONZÁLEZ HERNÁNDEZ
 JONATHAN HERNÁNDEZ	 AMÉRICO MARTÍNEZ RODRÍGUEZ	 CUTBERTO ORTIZ RANDA	 EVARISTO RODRÍGUEZ BELLO	 MARCO QUINTANA ANDRÉS SANTOS	 FELIPE AMADOR ROSA	 BENJAMÍN SÁNCHEZ BAUTISTA	 ISRAEL CABALLERO SÁNCHEZ	 ANTONIO GÓMEZ MOLINA	 SEBASTIÁN BAUTISTA		
 CRISTIAN RODRÍGUEZ	 MARTÍN TRUJILLO	 JOSÉ EDUARDO SOTO	 ABEL GARCÍA	 EFRAIM ALÉN	 DORLAN SÁNCHEZ	 JORGE LUIS					



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TU LLAMADA ES ANÓNIMA Y CONFIDENCIAL

Three young adults were also waving three different flags (Mexican, Argentinian, and a symbolic flag for indigenous communities) representing their solidarity with both each other and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (see figure 9). Furthermore, online were several Latin American countries represented in solidarity with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. For example, one person who was both physically at the commemoration also posted on Twitter, stating “#Uruguay presente” with their Uruguayan flag in a tweet showing Global Critical Solidarity with Argentina (see figure 10).



Figure 9. Flags of Mexico, Argentina, & Indigenous solidarity.



Figure 10. Uruguay Presente.

Beyond critical solidarity with countless Spanish-speaking communities, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and their context have bridged linguistic barriers as well. For example, commemorating the fortieth anniversary of *Los Desaparecidos* was a gentleman holding a sign in Portuguese, stating “não vai ter golpe” (there will be no blow) to show critical solidarity and speak out against military violence (see figure 11). Additionally, a gentleman was using English to express nostalgia for an era when Cristina was the Argentinian president (see figure 12).



Figure 11. Sign in Portuguese at Commemoration.



Figure 12. Sign in English at Commemoration.

IMPLICATIONS: (RE)MAKING IDENTITIES THROUGH GLOBAL CRITICAL SOLIDARITY

Just as la Chela had hoped, this work has highlighted instances where the stories of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have not only continued the narrative of their children through deeply

personal levels of connection, but they have further advanced the causes of others who experienced infringements upon their human rights. These individuals have found connection through tragedy, and they have experienced global critical solidarity. This work has shed light on this phenomenon. Indeed, people are (re)making the narratives of the Mothers in such a way that their history becomes relevant to us all. The Mothers set a precedence and demonstrated that silence is not a choice. They showed up for their children, just as people are now speaking out in solidarity for memory, truth, and justice with those who were disappeared or were even more visibly killed outright in the streets.

Even now, on June 20, 2020, the Mothers are seeing and will continue to see the fruits of their labor as the rejection of infringements on human rights continues to grow through more connections to their slogans. People are invoking the slogans of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo alongside the #BlackLivesMatter movement as a means of (re)making their powerful elocutionary speech acts in kinship with individuals who have suffered grotesque infringement upon their rights as humans. Yet again, people are taking the Mothers' words and repurposing them through global critical solidarity to demonstrate that they too are showing up and standing with others who have suffered highly traumatic experiences, and they too are stewards of solidarity.

Take, for example, Figure 13. This post exhibits deep forms of global critical solidarity and intersectionality. It invokes #Nuncamas, its French counterpart #PlusJamaisCa, #BlackLivesMatter, #justiceforgeorgesfloyd [sic] and many more, all while showing a staggering visual of protest in France. This is also highlighted by figure 14, where #Nuncamas was used to show solidarity with other lives lost due to police brutality, for simply being Black or for simply being Trans. These were the contexts for the murders of George Floyd in the United States, Adama Traoré in France, and Dilan Cruz and Alejandra Monocuco in Colombia.

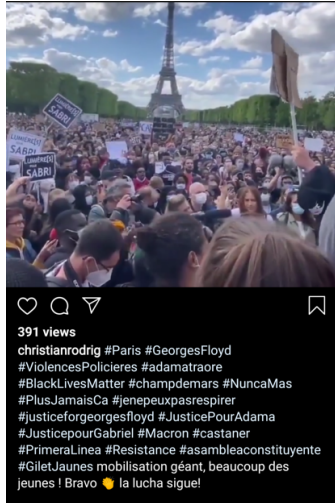


Figure 13. Protests in Paris, #’s used in solidarity.



Figure 14. Solidarity for a teen murdered during a protest in Colombia (and others).

While several studies have looked into the atrocious crimes against humanity that took place in Argentina from 1977 to 1983, this research joined this particular conversation to add depth to a global phenomenon currently taking place through the idea of Global Critical Solidarity. This concept carries supreme importance when considering vast international connections, and the similarities of human rights infringements that have taken place and continue to occur across geographic boundaries. In this work, it is evident that, seen through the lens of Global Critical Solidarity, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have stood as examples, as stewards for advancements in human rights, and as beacons of hope despite coming from such bleak circumstances. Through the use of critical ethnography and the concept of Global Critical Solidarity, difficult topics such as forced disappearances and overt police brutality across the globe can be researched with sensitivity and move us toward the potential for hermeneutic emancipation and recognition of gross infringements upon human rights. Lastly, I stand with the Mothers, I stand with Black colleagues, and through this research I stand in my belief that empathy as made possible through *Global Critical Solidarity* can (re)make these narratives until their stories are finally universally heard and may be laid to rest alongside la Chela and her daughter, in peace.

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